1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

From 1788 till the defeat and death of Tippu in 1799, Vīra Rāja IV helped the English in their wars against Mysore. Richter tells us that in 1792 when Lord Cornwallis had driven Tippu into Seringapaṭam and the British occupied that island, 'about 5,000 Coorgs who had been carried away by Tippu, with their wives and children, altogether about 12,000 souls, made their escape in the confusion that ensued and returned to their native country'.[1] Their old homes and lands were restored to the returning exiles, and they seem to have been accepted back into the Coorg fold without difficulty.

Vīra Rāja ruled till 1809 when he died, leaving behind only daughters. This gave rise to the inevitable succession disputes in which, in the end, Linga Rāja II, younger brother of the dead king, emerged triumphant in 1811. He ruled till his death in 1820 when he was succeeded by his twenty-year-old son Chikka Vīra Rāja (Vīra Rāja V). The latter was an incompetent and sensuous tyrant, and in 1834 he was deposed by the British who annexed Coorg. The rule of the Lingāyaṭ Rājas had come to an end.

V

Lewis Rice tells us that Coorgs formed the bulk of the armies of the Rājas.[2] He writes,

> these mountaineers (Coorgs) had a considerable share of intrepidity and perseverance; stratagem entered largely into their system of tactics, in war they were remarkable for their predatory habits, and their neighbours accused them on those occasions of adding cruelty to pillage. Like the modern guerilla, though they were unable to contend openly with regular troops, they intercepted their supplies, cut off their communications, and harassed them by surprises, a species of warfare admirably adapted to second the natural difficulties that a hilly country must present. An intimate knowledge of it, a strict obedience, and a singular devotion to their chief [i.e. Rāja] accompanied by a remarkable attachment to their wilds and an equal gallantry in defending them, may in some measure perhaps have compensated the want of military skill.[3]

The system of land tenure prevalent in Coorg directly contributed to the maintenance and development of the military tradition of Coorgs. Land revenue was the principal source of the wealth of the Rājas. The assessment was based on a survey and

[1] Op. cit., vol. iii, p. 327. [2] Ibid. [3] Op. cit., p. 326.

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

3. SOCIAL LIFE OF THE COORGS.

a. The Coorg house.

342 361 [241] The Coorg houses are generally situated close to their paddy-fields on a sheltering slope of Báne land, surrounded by clumps of plantain trees, sago and betel-nut palms and other fruit-bearing trees. A coffee garden and a small plot [231] for the growth of native vegetables are seldom absent, and, where the locality is favourable, a little tank well stocked with 361 fish is not uncommon. The position, the style of building 712 and the approaches of old Coorg houses strongly remind one [342] of small fortifications, and tradition points back to a time of [173] general feuds, when chief fought with chief, clan with clan. In the deep cadangas or ditches with high banks, we still see [726] memorials of that warlike state of affairs. These war-ditches intersect the mountainous districts in every direction, and resisted not only many a furious attack of contending parties, but also the force of the annual monsoon.

351 342 A deeply cut passage, paved with rough stones and overgrown with shady trees, and the sloping side walls decked with a variety of luxuriant ferns, leads you in angular lines to the doorway, passing under an out-house. Over a paved courtyard, on three sides enclosed by stables, store-rooms and servants' quarters, you come to the front of the main building, which is a square of one story and raised about 3 feet above 342 the ground. All the buildings are roofed with bamboos, and [824] thatched with rice-straw. Considering that there is an open square hall in the centre of the house, called nadumane there remain the four sides only for habitable quarters. The front side however is reserved for an open verandah—the reception hall. Near to the right end the principal door leads to the inner rooms, which are all dark, opening only by a small door into the inner square, which is lit by the sky-light formed

[P. 45]

CHAPTER VIII

COORG (Contd.)

IN the absence of a male issue in a house, a daughter is retained and married to a Coorg on condition that the children born are considered as the children of the wife's, and not of the husband's house. Such a husband may have another wife with children in his own house, and these have no share in the property of the other wife. Polygamy is not forbidden, but is seldom practised 858 857 595

It is worthy of note that the Coorgs have no priest to preside over the wedding ceremony. There are no religious functions such as those prevailing among the higher Hindu castes. There are some magical acts, which are related here. The bride's hand is grasped in order that she may be delivered into the hands of her husband. She eats with him on the wedding day to create community of life. Marriage ceremonies in all stages of culture are intended to neutralise the dangers and to make the union safe, prosperous and happy. It referred to the permanent joint life of man and woman, and the essence of the union is the joining together of the bridal pair. The practice of throwing rice may have originated in the idea of giving food to the evil influences to induce them to be propitious and to depart It is considered as a token of blessing. In many cases, it seems to have developed into a sympathetic mode of fertility. At one stage of the wedding, the bride veiled approaches the husband, and they see each other. These ideas may explain the origin of the bridal veil. Besides there is sexual shyness, and the ideas associated with women that these are dangerous as well as improper, and so they lead to effeminacy. Accordingly, the bride spends the wedding days with her girl friends and the bridegroom with young men who in the marriage institution are respectively called bridesmaids and groomsmen. 585 [793]

Polyandry

It has been observed that, in warlike races, the clannish feeling and family spirit often predominate over and absorb individual consciousness and personal rights. Among the Coorgs, family property descends not from father to son, as from generation to generation the eldest member acts as the head of the house. In olden times, the Coorgs are said to have lived in a state of general warfare, chief against chief, and Nadu against Nadu. As a relic of that age, the deep trenches which to this day are found intersecting the country in all directions may be considered. In such an age, destruction of life must have been great. But it was of course the male community that principally suffered in the turmoil. The people must soon 174 726 595 [428]

[74 726 595 have been exterminated under such a state of affairs. But if the surviving brothers were to become the rightful husbands of the widows, a second and an undiminished generation might in time take the place of the fallen. In more recent times, the Rajas used to keep a large number of armed men constantly in attendance on themselves. They were absent from home for weeks and months. On their return, their brothers would have to go to the Palace or accompany the Raja on some hunting or fighting expedition. The brothers at home would then take the place of the absent from home [428] and family. It is clear that the law of inheritance by the sister's son is unknown among the Coorgs. This, according to Richter, affords the strongest proof that polyandry is no Coorg custom.

Widow Marriage

587 Widows may remarry. Should any of the deceased husband's brothers choose to marry her, he may do so or she may be married to any other man. By doing so, she acquires the rights of the second husband and relinquishes all interest in her late husband's property, but not in her children. A second marriage is celebrated in a quiet manner and only the nearer relatives and some of the villagers are invited to the marriage feast. The strewing of rice and other ceremonies are dispensed with. After the removal of signs of widowhood, the bride appears in the apparel of married life.

Divorce

586 A man can divorce an unfaithful wife, but a wife has no remedy against her husband in case of his faithlessness. The Takkas, the Aruva of the house, the Takkas of the village, and some members of the wife's family with her Aruva meet in the hall of the husband's house, when as at betrothal the lamp is put between them; and the Aruva solemnly relinquishes the wife's claim to the husband's property. The children remain in the father's house and the unhappy woman returns with all her belongings to the parental roof. It has to be stated to the credit of Coorg women that such events are very rare.

Pregnancy and Childbirth

844 A woman's first confinement takes place at her mother's house whither she returns after the seventh month of pregnancy. There are no professional midwives among them. The women of the household who have 846 experience for their guidance render all the assistance. A few hours after birth she is bathed in very hot water, and with the abdomen well bound up, she is brought to bed in a lying posture in the best room of the house. This practice is quite at variance with what prevails among other Hindus [783] who relegate a woman in childbirth to an outhouse. Though the period of pollution lasts for seven days, a woman enjoys immunity from all house-

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

and more indefinite number was commanded by the Káriagára, who again acted under a Sarva-káriagára or General; both were distinguished by a gold banded scarlet head-dress, the kombu toppi.

As the Coorg force was not a standing army, it received no pay. Whilst on active duty as guards or during warfare, the soldiers were maintained at the public expense, and being remarkable for their predatory habits, they largely shared with the Rájahs in the spoil. Without discipline and organization, the Coorgs displayed their strength chiefly behind their stockades and Cadangas. In the open field they rarely faced the attacks of regular troops.

c. *Vírarája an ally of the East-Indian Company.*

Conclusion of the alliance.

About this period the first connection between the English and the Coorgs took place. Desirous of gaining the friendship of so able a partizan and foreseeing the strategical value of Coorg in the impending struggle with Tippu, the Government of the Company eagerly seized the proffered hand of Vírarája who dreaded and hated Tippu, from whom he could expect no mercy and whose assurances and promises, he knew, he could never trust. His hopes depended on his success in gaining the support of a powerful ally. His eyes were directed towards the rising star of the Company. The union with Tippu's enemies was therefore effected without difficulty. After the receipt of orders from Bombay to conclude in the name of the British Government an offensive and defensive alliance with the Rájah of Coorg, Robert Taylor, the English Chief at Tellicherry invited the Rájah to a conference. Accompanied by Capt. Brown, who had been sent to conduct him to the head-quarters of the Company on the Western Coast, Vírarája repaired thither in October 1790.